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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Public Health Service

Centers for Disease Control
and Prevention (CDC)
Atlanta GA 30341-3724

September 30, 2004

Mr. Richard Frandsen
Senior Counsel
House Committee on Energy and Commerce
2322 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515-6115

Dear Mr. Frandsen:

This letter follows up on discussions you had in June with staff of the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) concerning the U.S. Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. In response to questions and concerns raised by you and others, ATSDR has been exploring a variety of options for enhancing our understanding of health effects associated with exposure to contaminated drinking water at Camp Lejeune, and for more effectively communicating related information to the public.

The attached document summarizes ATSDR's ongoing work in each of four areas that the Agency is committed to pursuing:

- (1) convening an outside expert panel to explore the feasibility of additional epidemiological research related to health effects from past drinking water exposures at Camp Lejeune;
- (2) promoting additional toxicological research relating health effects with exposures to TCE and PCE;
- (3) enhancing communications to the effected community by adding materials to the Agency's web site; and
- (4) clarifying the summary in the 1997 Public Health Assessment for Camp Lejeune related to disease risk among the exposed population.

ATSDR staff will contact you, other interested congressional staff and members of the affected community to give updates and an opportunity to provide input on proceeding with the expert panel. We look forward to continuing to work with you, and thank you for your interest in this important matter. If you have questions or wish to discuss this further, please contact Barbara Rogers in the CDC Washington Office at (202) 260-3012.

Sincerely,


Henry Falk, M.D., M.P.H.

Director, National Center for Environmental
Health/Agency for Toxic Substances and
Disease Registry

Rear Admiral, U.S.P.H.S. (Retired)

Attachment

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Additional Activities ATSDR Intends to Pursue Related to Camp Lejeune

1. Convene Expert Panel

The Office of the Director of National Center for Environmental Health (NCEH)/ATSDR is developing plans to convene an expert panel to consider the feasibility of conducting additional epidemiological studies (human population-based studies) on the health effects potentially associated with past exposure to drinking water contaminated with trichloroethylene (TCE) or tetrachloroethylene (PCE) at Camp Lejeune. NCEH/ATSDR is in the process of developing specific elements of the proposal, including criteria for panelists, a charge to panelists, mechanisms for involving the community, location and date. NCEH/ATSDR will seek input on the proposal from members of the affected community and interested congressional staff before decisions are finalized.

The panel would be convened for two days in early 2005 and be comprised of at least five experts having expertise in environmental or occupational epidemiology, dose reconstruction, and/or health effects associated with exposure to TCE and PCE. NCEH/ATSDR would seek panelists who have experience working in partnership with communities facing health problems potentially associated with environmental contamination. Invited experts will be asked to disclose any real or perceived conflicts of interest. Individuals will be chosen based on their scientific expertise, and those having a real conflict of interest will be excluded. The NCEH/ATSDR Office of Science, with approval from the NCEH/ATSDR Director, would make final selections of all panelists.

NCEH/ATSDR is committed to involving the affected community. NCEH/ATSDR will invite the community to nominate qualified panelists for consideration. Community members will be invited to submit brief comments to the panelists for review prior to the panel meeting. On the first day of the panel meeting, members of the community would have an opportunity to speak before the panel, helping panelists gain further insight into their concerns.

Panel members would express and provide in writing their individual opinions. Consensus would not be sought, and votes would not be conducted. ATSDR would prepare a written summary of the panelists' individual comments and after review by the panel make it available to the public. ATSDR will make a decision about additional epidemiological research related to Camp Lejeune after reviewing the panelist opinions. If ATSDR decides to pursue additional studies, ATSDR would seek input on new study proposals using existing Agency procedures for peer review, human subjects review, and public comment.

2. Promote Additional Toxicological Research

ATSDR will promote additional toxicological research (animal testing) to further explore the health effects associated with exposure to TCE and PCE.

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(1) ATSDR will petition the National Toxicology Program (NTP) at the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) to conduct a "cross fostering" study, which would examine exposures shortly after birth, to improve understanding of potential health effects on exposed children. ATSDR scientists already have initiated discussions with NTP. NTP has advised ATSDR that the proposed study falls within the CERCLA requirements for NTP testing and has requested that ATSDR send NTP a study protocol. ATSDR is in the process of developing a study protocol and is evaluating key study design issues such as: which species should be studied; what health effects should be studied; and what length of time the animals should be studied. The Tri-Agency Superfund Applied Research Committee (TASARC), which is made up of representatives from ATSDR, EPA, and NTP, will review and comment on the protocol. ATSDR expects to submit a completed study protocol to NTP by November 2004. Once this occurs NTP will estimate the cost and timeline for completing such a study and determine whether NTP has sufficient resources to conduct the study.

(2) ATSDR will convene a meeting in October with representatives of the TASARC to discuss needs and potential opportunities for additional toxicity testing for TCE and PCE that would help to address public health concerns raised by the Camp Lejeune community.

(3) ATSDR, through its Voluntary Research Program, will continue to work with the Halogenated Solvents Industry Alliance, Inc. (HSIA), which submitted a letter of intent to ATSDR volunteering to conduct toxicological studies to answer outstanding public health questions related to TCE and PCE exposure. HSIA has already completed some studies, and the organization is working to complete additional research to fill identified research needs.

3. Enhance Health Communications

ATSDR will develop educational materials regarding health effects documented in the scientific literature as associated with exposure to TCE and PCE. This information will be made available to the public through the Camp Lejeune pages on the ATSDR web site. ATSDR is developing tables listing health effects that have been documented in humans and animals exposed to TCE and PCE. These tables should be posted on the agency Web site in November 2004.

4. Clarify Public Health Assessment

ATSDR has committed to clarify information regarding cancer risk associated with TCE and PCE exposure at Camp Lejeune summarized in Table 3 (p. 26) and discussed in related text in the 1997 Public Health Assessment for Camp Lejeune. The Agency is nearing completion of two mechanisms for notifying the public of the clarification, both of which will be posted on the Camp Lejeune pages of the ATSDR web site, directly below the link to the Camp Lejeune public health assessment so that anyone accessing the public health assessment on the Agency web site will be aware of the clarifying information:

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- (1) a modified version of Table 3 that is consistent with the text of the 1997 public health assessment in that it states that potential health effects (cancer and non-cancer) in adults are "not likely" and that health effects in children are "unknown;" and
- (2) a fact sheet summarizing community health concerns and providing information about potential health effects from past exposures at the site.